



# GENITAL WARTS

Answers To Your  
Questions About  
This Disease And  
How It Is Treated





## What Causes Warts? How Are They Spread?

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Genital warts, like warts on other parts of the body, are caused by viruses. There are more than 120 types. Doctors call warts **human papilloma virus (HPV)**.

Genital warts are **sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)**. They are spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with someone who has the virus. About two-thirds of all people who have sex with an infected partner will get warts. At least half of all people who have this infection **have no visible warts—yet they can infect others**.



## What Do Warts Look Like?

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Warts can be darker or lighter than your skin color.

When they grow in the moist parts of your body, they are often flat and smooth. On the dry parts of your body, they often feel hard and look bumpy. There can be a single wart or groups of them. Most warts are not noticed until they are about the size of the head of a pin. They can get much larger.

Many men first see warts on the outside of the penis. They can be inside the penis, too. Women can have warts inside or outside the vagina. Also, warts can grow in the throat, mouth and anus.





## How Can the Doctor Tell If I Have Warts?

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The doctor will look at them and do some tests. Since warts can look like other diseases, tests for syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are done at the same time. Women need a Pap test (a test for cancer). The wart virus can be in your body for a long time before you actually see warts. Be sure to tell the doctor if the size or the shape of the warts has changed. Don't treat warts with anything before going to the doctor.

## Is There Any Danger? Do They Hurt?

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Warts can hurt if they rub against something or grow in a place where there are other infections. They may itch or burn as they grow.



Don't scratch the warts. They may get worse and spread.

Rarely, babies of mothers with genital warts can get warts in their throats. Or, warts can block the birth canal.

Both men and women should go to a doctor as soon as they see that they have genital warts.





## What About Warts and Cancer?

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Women must have a Pap test (a test for cancer) every year. HPV infection may show up on the Pap test. Only a few women with certain types of wart virus in their cervix have the kind of cell changes linked with cancer, **but a yearly test is essential.**

Men, too, can have cell changes linked to cancer. They should tell their doctor that they have had warts and need to have the area checked regularly.

Most people will not get cancer from having warts.

## Can Warts Be Cured?

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Warts can be treated, but the virus that causes warts cannot be cured at this time.



## How Are Warts Treated?

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There is no perfect treatment. If you and the doctor decide to treat the warts, you will have to work together. You may have to see the doctor many times until all warts that can be seen have been cleared up. Allow time. Be honest. You need to work with your doctor so that you can follow your plan for treatment.





For warts on some parts of the body the doctor can:

- Use special little tools to freeze or burn the warts.
- Paint a medicine on the wart. When this is done you must wash it off at the time you agreed to do it.
- For large warts, special surgery or laser treatments may be used.

Some wart drugs should **never** be used by pregnant women. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant.

25% of those who get treatment will have warts again within 3 months. About 20% to 30% of all warts go away **without treatment**.



## What About My Sex Partners?

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Your partners need to be told that you have the wart virus and that this virus can be spread by having sex even if you can't see any warts. If you have genital warts, all of your sex partners who have warts need to see the doctor and talk about treatment.

## Should I Use Condoms?

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Be sure to use latex condoms during the time you or your partners are being treated for warts. Use condoms with all **new** partners. Not all areas of the body that spread wart virus can be covered by a condom. But if you are engaging in risky behavior, condoms are the best protection.





## REMEMBER . . .

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Warts are caused by a virus. It may take many months for the warts to grow. Meanwhile, you can't see them. The person who spread the warts to you may not know he or she has the virus. All sex partners must be checked and tested.

You can have the virus but not the warts. The wart virus is spread before and after you see the warts start to grow. You can have warts and other STDs at the same time.

Warts must be checked and tested at a clinic or doctor's office. Only a trained person can safely treat them.



The doctor needs your help to treat the warts. Plan to work together.



Some types of genital warts are linked to cancer. Both men and women should always tell their doctor that they have had genital warts.

Women should have a Pap test every year.





## How to Prevent Warts

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One sure way is to ABSTAIN from sex. **This means not having sex with anyone.**

Sexual fidelity is another way. This means that neither partner has sex with anyone else (as in marriage). A couple who practices sexual fidelity will not get a new STD if they are both free of disease from the start.

When people are drunk or high it is hard to make safe choices about having sex. Not using alcohol or street drugs is a very important part of preventing STDs.

People who choose not to abstain or practice fidelity must be responsible for protecting themselves from infection:

- Don't get drunk or high before having sex
- Don't use IV street drugs—never share needles
- Know that many STDs have no symptoms
- Know that birth control pills do not prevent infections
- Have fewer sex partners
- Know your partners—go with them for STD and HIV/AIDS tests
- Change the ways you have sex so there is no risk of infection
- Learn to talk about condoms (rubbers) with all your sex partners
- Learn the right way to use condoms
- Use a new latex condom and spermicide every time you have sex.





If you have questions or need  
more information, call your doctor,  
local health department or clinic.

Or call the  
**STD National Hotline**  
**1-800-227-8922**



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